

STATEMENT

VOICE reflections on the European Humanitarian Forum 2022

The first European Humanitarian Forum (EHF) took place in March 2022 as a hybrid event in Brussels. VOICE welcomes the recognition given by the co-hosts (the European Commission and the French Presidency of the Council of the EU) to: the “unprecedented set of challenges” faced by humanitarian actors; the impact of the ‘three Cs’ (conflict, climate, and COVID-19) as key drivers of needs; and the importance of ensuring an enabling environment for humanitarian aid and respect for International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

Overall, the main bottlenecks affecting the implementation of principled humanitarian aid were well reflected in the discussions and recognised as key issues in the current humanitarian landscape. However, while we appreciate the relevance of these discussions, it would be good if future Forums could identify specific commitments by the different stakeholders. This is especially important given the record level of humanitarian needs and resultant record funding gap. In 2022, it was estimated that at least 274 million people would need humanitarian assistance and protection worldwide (Global Humanitarian Overview 2022). The conflict in Ukraine has increased the level of needs and is contributing to a global raise in food prices, hunger, and economic instability.

In the [VOICE Statement ahead of the Forum](#), we identified the following issues that we felt needed to be addressed and feel that more work is needed in relation to each of them:

1. Humanitarian principles and International Humanitarian Law

Respect for and promotion of IHL was among the most prominent topics addressed during the Forum, highlighting the necessity of adherence to IHL in all conflict contexts. We strongly value the fact that the Forum raised key humanitarian issues at a very high political level but feel that it is essential that a clear message is given that humanitarian aid is neither a crisis management nor a foreign policy tool. VOICE would like to recall that the politicisation of humanitarian aid would run contrary to the intent of the [Consensus](#)¹ and the [Communication](#)² and would pose a major risk for the effectiveness and safety of humanitarian staff and their operations.

2. EU sanctions and counterterrorism measures

The discussion in the Forum around bank de-risking was important and we support the idea of establishing a structured multi-stakeholder dialogue at EU level on the topic. Empowering NGOs’ voices, including NGOs with modest resources, within such a dialogue will be critical. We welcome the ongoing efforts regarding the inclusion of explicit humanitarian exemptions in all EU Member States (MS) sanctions regimes but feel that this could be further strengthened. As this is a key issue affecting the whole sector, we feel that it is essential that further opportunities are established to discuss the broader impact of EU sanctions and counterterrorism measures on humanitarian action.

1. The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid
2. Communication on the EU’s humanitarian action: new challenges, same principles

3. Grand Bargain 2.0 commitments

VOICE acknowledges that the Grand Bargain (GB) 2.0 commitment regarding localisation was a key priority in the Forum, and that localisation guidelines will be developed. We look forward to actively engaging in the consultation process that will shape them.

However, specific steps to ensure quality funding - the other key priority of the GB 2.0 - need to be taken. Many solutions to promote flexible, predictable, and timely funding exist, and the EU and its MS could champion efficient humanitarian aid by moving some of their own innovative pilots forward to becoming standard procedures.

4. Climate resilience and greening of humanitarian aid

The focus on anticipatory actions that was evident at various stages during the Forum was very positive and VOICE hopes that further discussions will take place on the development of clear commitments, including that of additional funding for NGO partners for the implementation of greening of humanitarian aid. We strongly support the [joint declaration of 11 French NGOs](#), reacting on the humanitarian aid donors' declaration on climate and environment, calling on the *"Commission to set up an accountability mechanism to monitor the concrete implementation of the commitments made by donors, through annual public reporting and the organisation of an annual exchange session."*

5. Diversity and participatory approach

VOICE values the opportunity that was given to many NGOs to participate actively in different panel discussions and hopes that future Forums will allow more time to be allocated to open question and answer sessions during the high-level panels.

VOICE recognises that the Forum is an opportunity to exchange at a high-level around policy developments and key humanitarian challenges. As such, we would welcome the opportunity to support DG ECHO and the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU to organise the EHF 2023 in a participatory approach with their NGO partners.

Conclusion

The Forum was a great starting point to accelerate policy discussions at a European level about humanitarian aid. However, we believe that the aim of future Forums should be to combine these useful panel discussions with specific agreed outcomes to meet the key challenges that we face in addressing the record level of humanitarian needs. As such, VOICE looks forward to contributing to the identification and delivery of these outcomes.

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